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Flooding Creates Home Safety Concerns
Water Damage Could Lead to Mold

FRANKFORT, Ky. (April 10, 2008) – The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) has issued home safety guidelines to aid Kentuckians left with water damage in their homes due to large amounts of water run-off and flooding throughout the state.

One of the biggest public health concerns linked to water damage in the home is mold, fungi that can be found indoors and out. Molds grow best in warm, damp and humid conditions and spread by making spores.

"Though mold is almost always present in the air, it grows best in damp areas where humidity levels are high," said Guy Delius, acting director of the public health protection and safety division in DPH. "The recent, heavy rains experienced throughout the state caused flooding in several areas, and many homes experienced water damage. This is a concern for homeowners, not only because of damage to their home, but it also could lead to a mold problem if left untreated."

To recognize the signs of mold, look for discolored walls possibly showing water damage, or green or black spots apparent on walls. Mold also has a musty, earthy smell, or a foul stench.

"Allergy sufferers are those who are usually affected the most by mold exposure. Symptoms usually include nasal congestion, itchy or watery eyes, wheezing or skin irritation," said William Hacker, M.D., DPH commissioner and CHFS acting undersecretary for health. "More severe reactions may include fever or shortness of breath. Those who have medical concerns regarding mold exposure should contact their health care provider."

To decrease exposure and reduce mold in the home, DPH recommends that homeowners keep the humidity level of the home between 40 and 60 percent. The use of an air conditioner or dehumidifier may be used to achieve a lower level of humidity. Always use exhaust fans when showering and cooking. Mold inhibitors for paint are also available from home improvement stores.

For cleaning a small area affected by mold, most homeowners may clean up the mold problem themselves. DPH officials recommend the use of protective glasses or goggles for the eyes. Also wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves and wear clothing that can be washed afterwards. If there is a heavy mold growth area, you may wish to use a basic respirator or suitable mask to prevent breathing the spores.

Other recommendations include:

- Ensure that the area is well ventilated before beginning.
- Remove all previously soaked porous items that have been wet for more than 48 hours and are not able to be cleaned and dried.
- Disinfect hard surfaces; a solution may be mixed of 1 cup of household bleach with 1 gallon of water.
- Contact a mold remediation consultant for severe mold cases.

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To prevent mold from coming back, DPH recommends implementing mold prevention efforts in the home. For flooding damage, ensure that the home is properly cleaned and dried out by using the aforementioned steps. For small spots, make sure to remove the source of moisture.

“Mold cannot grow without a source of water or moisture,” said Delius. “By removing the water source, the homeowner can ensure that the mold growth should not return.”

If mold growth persists, the homeowner may want to contact a mold remediation professional for more advice. The source of the problem can also be moisture that is hidden in the home.

For more information on mold, visit the Cabinet for Health and Family Services Department for Public Health Web site at <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/info/phps/mold.htm>, or contact your area local health department’s environmental public health office.